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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000333

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [IV](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW FORCES LEADER SORO TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER;  
ANNOUNCEMENT EXPECTED TODAY

REF: A. A) ABIDJAN 281  
[1](#)B. B) MARCH 27 UNCLASS BRENCICK-MASSINGA EMAILS

Classified By: PolOff Laura Taylor-Kale, Reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On March 26 the ex-rebel movement New Forces (NF) announced that it has reached a deal with President Gbagbo's representatives in which NF leader Guillaume Soro will become Prime Minister. Some press reports and NF sources indicate that Gbagbo will issue a decree to this effect today, March 27, but it is not clear that this will happen and there has been no official announcement so far by the Presidency. According to UN High Representative for Elections (HRE) Gerard Stoudman, Burkinabe president Compaore will submit the agreement to name Soro PM to the African Union and the UN Security Council for ratification. Some sources suggest that Soro will come to Abidjan immediately to take up his new duties while others aver that he will take his time to allow current PM Banny a graceful exit. No firm word yet on the composition of Soro's government. Banny has not resigned, but in a speech made the same evening as the NF announcement he hinted that he is ready to leave. A source in Stoudman's office speculates that Gbagbo and Soro may have reached a private deal giving Soro broad powers as PM in exchange for his support for a Gbagbo re-election bid. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) In a statement on its website, the NF announced late evening on March 26 that it had reached agreement with President Gbagbo's negotiating team in Ouagadougou to name NF Secretary General Guillaume Soro as the next Prime Minister.

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This announcement had been expected for some time, but there has so far been no official announcement by the Presidency. Embassy officers spoke to Alain Lobognon, the NF Director for Communications, who is currently in Ouagadougou, on the morning of March 27. Lobognon confirmed that the negotiating parties signed the agreement on March 26 and added that President Gbagbo will sign the decree appointing Soro as PM today, March 27, in time for it to be broadcast on the 8:00 pm evening news. However, it is not clear that this will happen. Lobognon emphasized that the NF negotiating party will remain in Ouagadougou until the UN Security Council formally endorses the Ouagadougou Peace Accord (OPA) and the nomination of Soro as Prime Minister. Lobognon commented that it had not been the NF's intention to accept the post of PM but that Gbagbo had been pressing them since December to do so. In the end, the NF concluded that this action is the "best way to reestablish the peace."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Banny has been evasive about his remaining tenure as PM. However, just a few hours before the NF announced the agreement to appoint Soro PM, Banny made a speech to supporters in Yamoussoukro, hinting that he is ready to leave. Banny stated that "every mission has an end" and that "sometimes sacrifices have to be made," for the good of the

nation. Banny did not announce his resignation but did invoke the international community, noting that he was serving the nation by appointment of the UNSC. HRE Stoudman told us Banny is ready to resign but wants some kind of statement to that effect from the UNSC. Stoudman thought a statement from the UNSC president (PRST) might meet this requirement.

¶4. (C) Econ Counselor spoke to a senior official in the Office of HRE Stoudman on March 26, who noted that the agreement to name Soro PM was inevitable, and that ONUCI and the HRE have been in close contact with all Ivorian parties since the March 4 signing of the OPA. The official added that the HRE believes that Soro and Gbagbo had come to a private arrangement that justifies their taking the risks associated with this deal (The HRE rep alluded to the risk of a "Savimbi Outcome" for Soro and the possible loss of executive and financial authority in the midst of a tough electoral campaign for Gbagbo). Under the terms of their private arrangement, Soro would de facto break ties with the political opposition (which has of late appeared visionless and shown signs of fracturing) and Soro would support Gbagbo's re-election bid in the northern, NF-held territories. In exchange, the FPI would agree to a longer, more thorough identification process than the one currently envisioned in the three-month period outlined in the OPA, and possibly grant other, unidentified concessions. (Note: Soro just turned 35, and is unable to run for President until he is 40, according to Article 35 of the Constitution. End Note)

¶5. (C) HRE Stoudman told us in the afternoon of March 27 that Gbagbo will invoke Article 53 of the constitution to give Soro broad powers. However, the exact nature of those powers had not yet been agreed upon as of last weekend and the HRE speculated that the issue may remain a stumbling

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block to an agreement. On the other hand, the Soro and Gbagbo camps have reached agreement on the composition of a new government and Stoudman expects the government to be announced by the end of this week or early next week. Stoudman said that once Gbagbo has issued the decree naming Soro PM, Compaore will submit the agreement to the AU and then the UNSC for their approval. After that, the UN will send a technical assistance team, probably headed up by the deputy head of DPKO, to Cote d'Ivoire. The team will draft a report for the SYG to present to the UNSC, which should be ready by mid-May or so. That report will be the basis for another UNSC resolution reviewing ONUCI's mission here and prolonging its mandate.

¶6. (C) French DCM here told us that, despite UNSC 1721, he is under the impression that the UNSC will be asked to merely "ratify" (enteriner), rather than debate and approve, the appointment of Soro as Prime Minister. French DCM added that he has heard varying reports as to when Soro intends to come to Abidjan. Some say he will come to the capital immediately while others aver that he will delay his return in order to give the UNSC time to ratify his appointment and Banny an opportunity to exit gracefully.

¶7. (C) Also on March 27 Emboffs met with Navigue Konate, the president of the FPI youth wing and number two on President Gbagbo's negotiating team in Ouaga. Konate dismissed the unarmed opposition as ineffective and counterproductive to the reintegration of the country, and conceded the President's camp has its work cut out for it in bringing the militias, Young Patriots, and FESCI to heel in a post-conflict environment. In recounting the negotiation process, he acknowledged that President Compaore's team played a critical role in forging the eventual compromise.

¶8. (C) A senior official in the opposition Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI) told Poloff on March 27 he was largely pessimistic about the prospects of elections in 2008,

commenting that once Soro becomes part of the government, neither he nor Gbagbo will have an incentive to proceed to elections: Gbagbo will not want to lose and Soro will have the access to power and money that he needs to realize his own presidential ambitions once he is of age. However, the PDCI official added that Soro and Gbagbo remain mortal enemies and that Soro will be protected by Burkinabe soldiers is evidence that he fears for his security in Abidjan. In order to assure success of the peace process, he argued for close monitoring of the new government by the international community.

19. (C) Comment: Despite the numerous unanswered questions about Soro's powers, the identification/voter registration process, and possible secret agreements between Soro and Gbagbo and unhappiness among many in the political opposition for being marginalized by the Ouaga talks, the apparent nomination of Soro to the Prime Minister's office (on schedule according to the OPA) represents another tangible advance in the peace process. END COMMENT  
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